



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**

ACCEPTABLE  
EXCEPTIONAL  
CIRCUMSTANCES  
& EVIDENCE  
**GUIDANCE**

**SHAPING  
A BETTER  
WORLD  
SINCE 1845**





# ACCEPTABLE EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES & EVIDENCE GUIDANCE

This guidance supports the University's **Exceptional Circumstances Procedure**.

Table 1 provides guidance on exceptional circumstances normally considered acceptable, and the type of evidence required to support the application, where applicable. Table 2 provides guidance on circumstances not normally considered acceptable. These are guides and are not intended to be prescriptive. All cases should be considered on an individual basis.

The School Exceptional Circumstances Committee (SECC) should continue to use their own judgement and discretion when deciding if the exceptional circumstances application should be accepted on the basis of the facts presented.

The responsibility of proof to support a claim lies with the student at all times. If a student is unclear as to what evidence is acceptable to demonstrate the impact of their situation they should seek advice from the **SU Advice** or their **School** in the first instance.

Self-verification without evidence is acceptable up to a maximum of seven calendar days (excluding University closure periods). Where impact lasts beyond this, or in cases of disruption experienced in an examination, evidence is required to support the application. Evidence must be:

- Relevant to the assessment(s) to which the exceptional circumstances application relates.
- In English. If an English translation of a document in another language is provided, the translation must be certified as an accurate translation. The University may check that the translation is accurate.
- From an independent body, e.g. counselling service / G.P./ hospital.
- Where written by appropriately qualified professionals who are independent of the student, be on headed paper and signed and dated by the author. Evidence presented by email may be acceptable if the email has been sent by the author from the official domain name of the author's organisation.
- Be unaltered by the student.

It is not appropriate to submit personal or sensitive photos related to illness or injury as evidence. Official documents, such as medical certificates or letters from healthcare professionals, should be supplied where appropriate to support the application.

# TABLE ONE

## NORMALLY ACCEPTABLE

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES - NORMALLY ACCEPTABLE	NOTES	EVIDENCE REQUIRED (BEYOND SELF-VERIFICATION PERIOD)
<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>ILLNESS OF STUDENT</b></p>	<p>An unforeseen incapacitating illness or medical condition, or an exacerbation of an on-going illness or medical condition (unless this is a fluctuating condition for which reasonable adjustments under an Individual Student Support Agreement (ISSA) have already been made).</p>	<p>Medical documentation e.g. note from G.P., prescription, hospital discharge note, appointment letters.</p> <p>Personal photographs are not appropriate to include with an application.</p> <p>Where illness occurs during an examination, the student must inform the invigilator, or School in cases of remote examinations, immediately to be recorded. The University will have access to this record, e.g. the invigilator's report, as evidence to support the application.</p>
<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>HOSPITALISATION</b></p>		<p>Medical documentation confirming the hospitalisation will be required. E.g. Discharge notes, a medical letter/certificate from the relevant hospital confirming the nature of the student's circumstances; letter of appointment for a specialist consultation, investigation or outpatient treatment.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>BEREAVEMENT</b></p>	<p>The application should make clear the nature of the relationship between the student and the deceased, and how the student's ability to undertake the assessment has been affected.</p>	<p>A death certificate, funeral order of service, death notice, medical evidence or evidence of prior contact with support services.</p>

4	<b>FAMILY ILLNESS</b>	The application should make clear the nature of the relationship between the student and the person ill, and how the student's ability to undertake the assessment has been affected.	A medical certificate/letter from a medical professional confirming the nature and severity of the circumstances.
5	<b>IT AND/OR COMPUTER FAILURE DURING COMPUTER-BASED EXAMINATIONS</b>	Student must immediately inform the invigilator, or School in cases of remote examinations, to be recorded. Therefore, self-verification is not acceptable as the relevant record should be available to the School as a minimum evidence requirement.	<p>Screen shots of the issue which demonstrate the timing and the longevity of the issue. Where relevant, a statement of disrupted service from an internet provider.</p> <p>The University will have access to the relevant records, e.g. the invigilator's report, as evidence to support the application.</p>
6	<b>ACUTE PERSONAL/ EMOTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES/ SERIOUS FINANCIAL PROBLEMS</b>	Acute circumstances that impact on a student's personal, emotional, or mental wellbeing and which have impacted their ability to engage with day-to-day life, including assessments.	An original medical certificate or letter from an appropriate medical professional or a letter from the University Counselling Service (or equivalent) confirming a list of counselling session attended dates. Note that it is unlikely that evidence will be given if there has been limited or no recent engagement.
7	<b>VICTIM OF CRIME</b>		Written evidence from the Police (including a crime reference number). Where the impact of the crime has led to a medical or other professional consultation, an original medical certificate or letter from an appropriate medical professional or a letter from the University Counselling Service (or equivalent)
8	<b>SERIOUS PERSONAL DISRUPTION</b>	Divorce; fire; jury service, serious unforeseen/unplanned childcare difficulties.	Appropriate corroborating evidence must be provided.

<p>9</p>	<p><b>PREGNANCY-RELATED ILLNESS OR STRESS</b></p>	<p>This also includes the stages following childbirth. Anxiety or stress suffered by a student in relation to the pregnancy of a wife/partner would be acceptable in appropriate circumstances.</p>	<p>Medical documentation confirming the pregnancy-related illness or stress must be provided in support of such grounds e.g. existing medical evidence.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p><b>OTHER</b></p>	<p>The list of circumstances cannot be exhaustive and it is possible that other circumstances will arise that should be considered as acceptable. Examples that have arisen are listed in the next column and additional examples will be added as they become known.</p>	<p>Independent evidence would normally be required for these types of circumstances to enable the SECC to determine the merit of the application, based on the individual circumstances. Examples of other circumstances that might be considered to be acceptable in individual circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requirements of military service;</li> <li>• Representing the University at a national event or involvement in some other significant/prestigious event;</li> <li>• Attendance at a wedding where the student is a member of the wedding party;</li> <li>• Unforeseen or exceptional work commitments in the case of part-time students.</li> </ul>



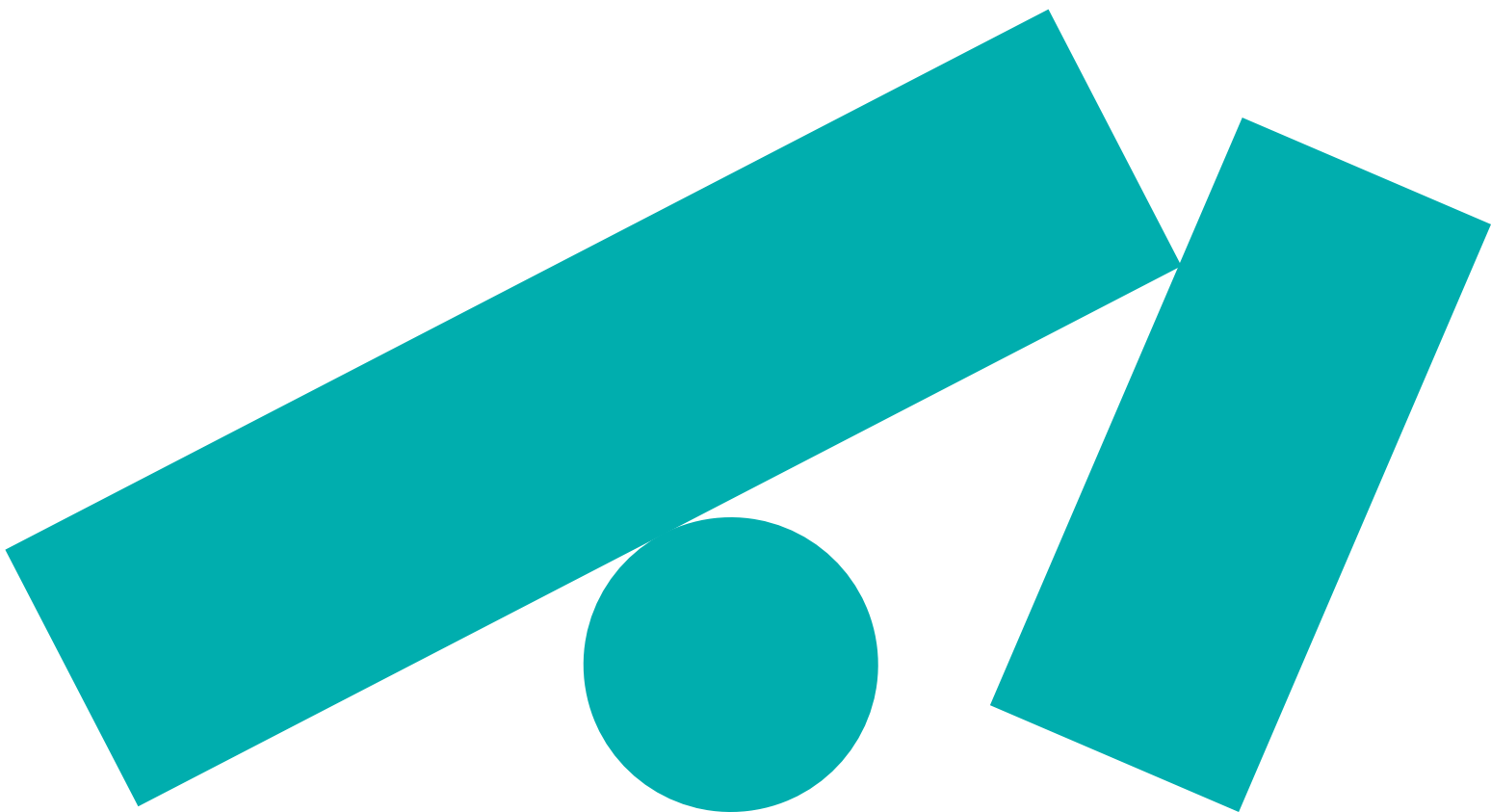
# TABLE TWO

## NORMALLY NOT ACCEPTABLE

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES - NOT NORMALLY ACCEPTABLE		NOTES
1	<b>SOCIAL OR SPORTING ACTIVITIES</b>	Hectic social life; parties; visits to/from friends; sporting activities. It is the student's responsibility to maintain a proper balance between social/sporting activities and study (but see <b>Elite, Academy and Sports Bursary Athletes: Guidelines for Academic Flexibility</b> ).
2	<b>TEMPORARY SELF-INDUCED MEDICAL CONDITIONS</b>	Hangover; drug taking (excluding prescribed medication).
3	<b>LONG-STANDING CONDITIONS</b>	Chronic conditions for which the student has received support and reasonable adjustments; a long-standing condition, such as susceptibility to hay fever; a late diagnosis of a physical illness or condition, the symptoms of which were known to the student.
4	<b>NON SERIOUS PERSONAL &amp; DOMESTIC DISRUPTIONS (which could have been anticipated or planned)</b>	Moving house; holiday; attending a wedding (although consideration may be given if the student is playing an active role in the wedding, for example, best man or bridesmaid).
5	<b>WORK COMMITMENTS</b>	Paid or voluntary work. Students are expected to plan their work/study balance before embarking on a course and seek support at the earliest opportunity if unforeseen difficulties arise.
6	<b>TRANSPORT ISSUES</b>	It is expected that students will ensure that they arrive at the assessment on time, irrespective of the form of transport used or relied upon. Students should ensure reasonable time in any travel arrangements made as moderate delays are considered to be a normal expectation. However, an inability to travel as a result of circumstances beyond the student's control may constitute sufficient cause e.g. cancellation of a train/plane, car breakdown.



7	<b>EXAM STRESS</b>	Feeling stressed and anxious leading up to and during an assessment(s) is a common experience of many students. It is not considered to be an acceptable exceptional circumstance unless an acute impact is demonstrated.
8	<b>ASSESSMENT ERRORS/ PLANNING ISSUES</b>	Misreading the examination timetable; oversleeping /alarm clock not going off causing student to be late for or miss an exam or assessment; completing and submitting coursework too late and missing deadlines (time management problems); non-availability of books or other resources; deadlines being close together or examinations scheduled close together.
9	<b>IT AND/OR COMPUTER FAILURE</b>	For continuous assessment/coursework, loss or corruption of files is not an acceptable extenuating circumstance. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all work which is electronically stored, generated and/or submitted is sufficiently backed up. However, if failure happens during an online examination, this may be considered.



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